

Sunday School

ICONIUM AND LYSTRA.

Acts 14: 8-22.

Lesson for May 16, 1909.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"All the gods of the nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens."—Psalm 96: 5.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 14: 1-10. T.—Acts 14: 11-28.
W.—2 Tim. 3: 10-17. Th.—Mark 6: 1-6.
F.—1 Cor. 8: 1-6. S.—2 Cor. 6: 1-10.
S.—2 Cor. 4: 5-18.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Varied Missionary Experiences—

- A miracle at Lystra, vs. 8-10.
- Paul worshipped, then stoned, vs. 11-19.
- Successful work at Derbe, vs. 20, 21.
- Return to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, vs. 21, 22.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Paul and Barnabas remained a long time at the Pisidian Antioch and its neighborhood, and firmly planted a Christian church, which had no connection with the synagogue, and was composed largely of Gentiles, who were received directly, and not by way of Jewish proselytism. They were finally driven out of the territory by the persecution instigated by the Jews, who used especially the influence of "women of honorable estate" who had become proselytes to Judaism.

They came unto Iconium, about seventy-five miles east of Antioch. Their experiences in these two towns were very similar. They went to the synagogue and so spake that a large number of Jews and Greeks (probably Greek Jews) believed. But many Jews were "disobedient." Paul's message of Glad Tidings came in a form demanding obedience. The disobedient Jews stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and made them evil-affected against the brethren, especially Paul and Barnabas. The town was divided in factions. But men's souls were stirred up—some for, and some against the Gospel.

The apostles remained there a long time. They were bold in their speech and aggressive in their work. The Lord brought to their aid the testimony of "signs and wonders done by their hands." In course of time the population took sides, "part held with the Jews and part with the apostles." An attack was finally made on the apostolic party by the opposite party in which were included "their rulers." The apostles became aware of it in time to flee. But they left behind them a permanent work, in an established congregation of Christians, composed of the same elements as the church at Antioch.

The easiest path of escape from the impending danger, led them "unto the cities of Lycaonia." This region may not have been on the route they had planned. It is probable that the urgency of their danger determined their course. It was a wild and semi-barbarous region. The population was sparse and the towns small. There were few Jews in that region, and we find no mention of synagogues. It was a region not under the direct government of the Romans, and the language differed from that the apostles used. It is probable that the Lycaonians knew enough Greek to understand Paul, with some difficulty, or that Paul could use their tongue to some extent. At any rate, the apostles were now in a distinctly foreign country, with the distinctive problems of foreign missionaries to solve. We are not told their experiences, except in the two principal towns of the region, Lystra and Derbe.

At Lystra there was a poor unfortunate, like him at the beautiful gate of the temple. He heard Paul preach. Apparently he was accustomed to hear Paul. The apostle, in the

absence of a synagogue, was perhaps preaching in the street, or the market place. This cripple attracted his special attention. The apostle could see the man's faith. Faith is sometimes visible in men. The cripple had "faith to be made whole," or "saved." The apostle addressed him in a loud voice, "Stand upright on thy feet." The man's faith seems to have been the cause of Paul's special interest in him, not the necessary condition to his healing. Healing of the lame was wrought by the Master, and through the apostles, indiscriminately whether faith existed in the healed or not. Healing was in order to faith or its increase.

The multitude saw the miracle, and went wild with excitement, supposing the gods had come down to earth. They thought Barnabas was Jupiter, and Paul, Mercury. There was an old story current among them that Jupiter and Mercury had visited that region in visible form long ago. They jumped to the conclusion that they had returned. These were a rude, uncultured people, and as is usual with such, were thoroughly superstitious. Superstition reaches conclusions at a jump. Without hesitation they designated Barnabas, Jupiter, the chief of the gods, and Paul, Mercury, the messenger and spokesman of the gods. Perhaps there was that in the appearance and manner of the two that suggested this mistake. Barnabas was probably the older man and Paul looked less majestic and benignant. He certainly took the lead in speech. The priest of Jupiter, whose temple was beyond the walls of the city, accompanied by the throng, brought the things of appropriate sacrifice to the gates where the apostles were, to sacrifice to them. This, in their eyes, was a horrible thing to do. They rushed forth, rent their clothes, a token of deepest distress, and appealed to the multitude to desist. They declared themselves men, and not gods—men whose special mission was to put an end to this very idolatry, which they called "vain things." They spoke of the living God, who made all things. In the past, this true God had "suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways." But He had never left any nation without testimony of himself and his character. The laws and conduct of nature are God's witnesses always and everywhere.

Paul's argument against heathenism finally succeeded in preventing the proposed worship.

But the Jews at Antioch had been deeply offended. They sent emissaries to Iconium to hunt the apostles down, and, joined by others at Iconium, they followed them to Lystra. There they got the ear of the multitude. Superstitious people must have some theory to account for everything. They could not account for the apostles by calling them gods, then who and what were they? Paul's explanation was not satisfactory. But the explanation given by these Jews from Antioch and Iconium was satisfactory. Perhaps these explained that they cast out devils through the prince of the devils.

They caught Paul, stoned him in the street, and, thinking him dead, they dragged him out of the town to rot. Why Barnabas was not treated in the same way we are not told. There were some disciples made at Lystra, among them were probably an old woman, named Lois, and a younger, named Eunice, and a boy, Timothy. The disciples were standing around Paul's body, when he revived and arose, and they went to the town, and the next day he and Barnabas went to Derbe.

They staid long enough at Derbe to found a strong church. They were not molested by the Jews, who, having accomplished Paul's death, as they supposed, went back to report the destruction of Christianity.

Paul, at Derbe, was on the road home to Tarsus. There must have been strong inclination to proceed thither. But, instead, they re-traced their steps to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. Wonderful men! On this journey they introduced more perfect organization in the church, appointing "elders in every church."

W. D. Hedleston.